

NSC BRIEFING

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25 February 1954

THE SYRIAN SITUATION

I. Current Situation

- A. Shishakli overthrown by army and politicians.
- B. New regime has proclaimed intention to select civilian president. Army officers in background.
1. Mentioned as possible president - 77-year-old Hashim al Atasi, who was president 1937-39, 1949-51. Selected as rallying point for military and civilian malcontents.
2. Leading military figure appears to be Captain Mustafa Hamdani, chief of intelligence. Probably supported by other younger officers and present chief of staff.

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25 YEAR RE-REVIEW

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II. Immediate prospects in Syria

- A. Uneasy alliance of military and civilian
- B. Initially emphasis likely to be on restoration of constitutional life abolished 5 years ago. *12 Political leaders arrested in Jan 54 now freed*
 - 1. Notorious divisions among Syrian politicians likely to renew civilian wrangling that brought military to the fore in 1949.
 - 2. This prospect enhances opportunities for such active social revolutionists as Akram Hawrani.
- C. Meanwhile, military likely to insist on civilian rule which protects army's preeminent position in national affairs.
- D. Military leaders will be engaged in struggle for power within army.

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- E. Outlook for Syrian internal stability not bright. Internal dissension invites traditional meddling by other Arab neighbors, particularly Iraq. Israel may be tempted to make moves to consolidate position in areas disputed with Syria.

III. Implication for United States

- A. Syria in immediate future will be too preoccupied to concern itself with foreign issues.
- B. No progress on economic aid agreement, refugee resettlement and Johnston plan.
- C. Syria for time being will faithfully follow Arab League, will not commit itself on East-West issue. No indication that new leaders anti-Western.

NEW BRIEFING

SECRET 25 February 1954

THE LATEST CRISIS IN SYRIA

I. Current Situation

Not given; re-written

A. Reported revolt of 3-6,000 troops in northern cities.

1. Aleppo radio broadcasting incitement to revolt, claiming wide popular and army support.

2. Opposition forces reportedly occupy Deir ez Zor, Homs and Hama.

B. Shishakli in Damascus apparently controls government and rest of 34,000-man army.

1. Government sending troops and planes northward.

2. Strict censorship; government radio silent.

Shishakli

given six hours to resign

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II. Implications for Shishakli

- A. First serious army defection during his four-year-old military dictatorship.
- B. Demonstrates Shishakli's unpopularity.
- C. Situation, following Shishakli's 27 January move against opposition leaders, is most serious challenge to his continued hold on Syria.
- D. However, unless more major units of army defect, he will probably remain in power.
 - 1. units below Damascus joining revolt. If true and if extended, his position will become untenable.

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III. Implication for United States

- A. Unlikely Shishakli will ever bring stability and peace to Syria.
- B. His preoccupation with immediate problem leaves little opportunity to move with US on: Economic aid agreement -- Johnston plan -- Refugee resettlement.

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SHISHAKLI AND POSSIBLE SUCCESSORS

1. Shishakli

A. Forty-five year-old general seized power in 1949 army coup, setting up civilian regime. This discarded in 1951; had himself elected president in July 1953.

B. Shishakli mainly concerned with maintaining power. Not committed publicly on East-West issue, privately pro-Western.

2. Possible successors

If overthrown, likely be replaced by another military regime, which to satisfy opposition to military rule, may set up civilian regime under former president Hashim al Atasi or some other figurehead. No strong group of Syrian politicians in sight.

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